DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 073 RC 015 551

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TITLE Fifteen Most Common Needs of Indian Education.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the National Indian Child Conference (6th, Albuquerque, NM, October 29, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Standards; *American Indian Education; American Indians; Behavior Standards; *Educational Assessment; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Language of Instruction; Learning Disabilities; Parent Participation; Public Schools; Student Mobility; *Student Needs; Student Placement; Teacher Improvement; Teacher Supervision; Teaching Methods; *Time on Task; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools; Johnson O Malley Act

ABSTRACT

Educational needs characteristic of programs in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools or schools receiving Johnson-O'Malley funds on 16 reservations across the United States were presented with suggestions for meeting these needs. The needs were (1) increase academic engagement from the observed one-third of time intended for instruction; (2) increase use of cues and reinforcers and student involvement in the learning process to assure entry level skill mastery; (3) appropriately challenge students in academic performance and behavior compliance; (4) develop coordination among the referral, assessment, placement, and instructional processes in special education; (5) functionally define learning disabilities; (6) provide secondary school vocational education; (7) improve coordination between regular and special education; (8) improve parental involvement in the educational system; (9) eliminate effects of teacher isolation and cultivate professionalism; (10) decrease staff turnover or its effects; (11) establish a functional relationship between student Individualized Education Programs (IEPS) and classroom instruction; (12) improve inservice training; (13) decrease frequent student transfers between public and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools; (14) provide instruction in English; and (15) adequately supervise teachers. Six figures provide data and amplify the text. (LFL)

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ED264073

FIFTEEN MOST COMMON NEEDS OF INDIAN EDUCATION

By

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Paper presented at the National Indian Child Conference (6th, Albuquerque, NM, October 19, 1984).

RC015551

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FIFTEEN MOST COMMON NEEDS OF INDIAN EDUCATION*

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INTRODUCTION

Today I am going to report to you what my research of the past several years reveals to be the fifteen most common needs which are generally characteristic of BIA education programs.

To give perspective to my data, what I am about to say must be couched within the larger picture, i.e., the general educational status of Federally recognized Indian students that are served within BIA, and BIA contract schools, and Federally recognized Indian students served in the public schools through support from the Johnson-O'Malley act of 1934.

This perspective focuses on three facets of education generally. They are average daily attendance, dropout rates, and non-enrollment.

As shown in Figure 1, in FY 1984, 43,193 Federally recognized Indian students were enrolled in BIA and BIA funded programs, and 170,030 Federally recognized Indian students were enrolled in public school programs which received Johnson-O'Malley support, for a total of 213,223 students. This represents a 2.3% increase over the year before.

Combining these populations of Federally recognized Indian students into one population, for comparison purposes, we note, as illustrated in Figure 2, that in every respect, the educational status of Federally recognized Indian students is inferior to that of students in the public schools generally.

Collapsing the data, we know that, all things considered - truancy, absenteeism, non-enrollment, and dropouts, on any given school day, 21 to 27 of every 100 chairs intended for Federally recognized Indian students in the schools of America are sitting empty. Though comparative achievement data are not presented here, the trend is similar. Last year, the United States Department of Education published its "Nation at Risk Report". My data suggest that not only is a nation at risk, but nations within a nation are at an even greater risk.

If this is true as I believe it is, what is to be done? To begin, we must take an intelligent, mature, and respectful look at the facts. In other words, we must establish a data base and work from it. We in education at all levels are inclined toward data free

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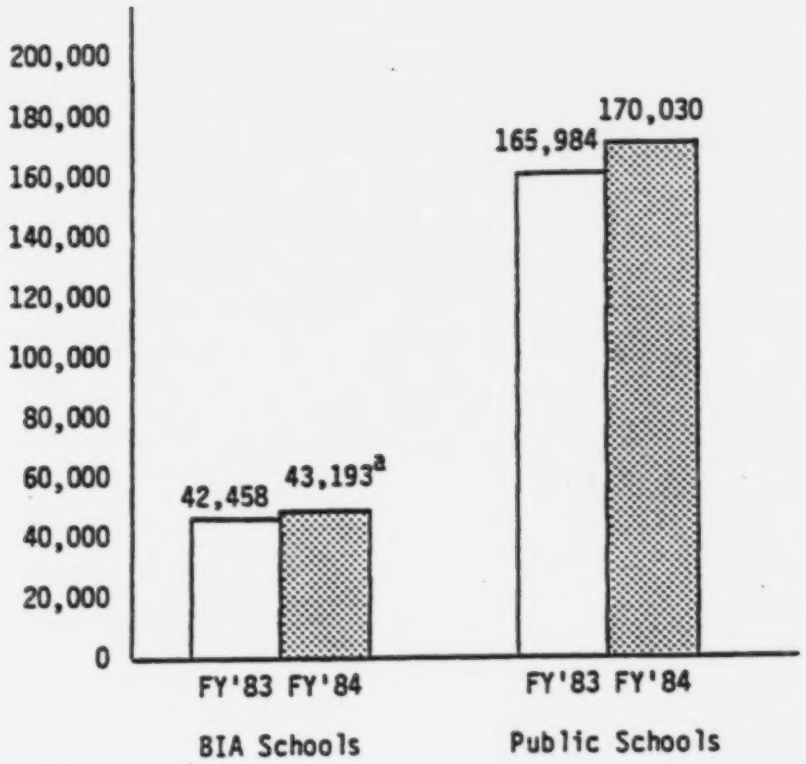
*This paper was presented at the Sixth National Indian Child Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 29, 1984

FIGURE 1

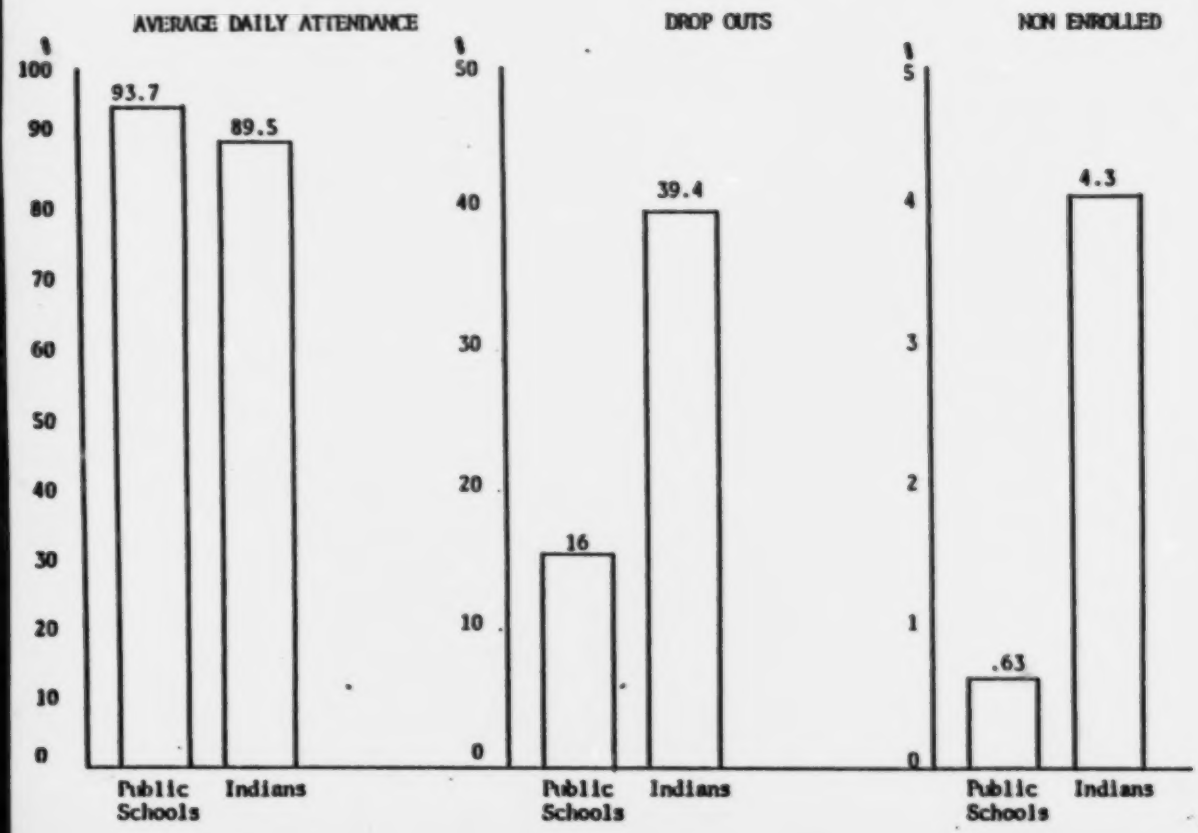
Populations of Federally Recognized Indian Students



[a]This is an estimate that includes 1984 BIA funded students who live in dorms and attend public schools.

FIGURE 2

THE STATUS OF INDIAN STUDENTS COMPARED TO PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS



decision-making: toward planting our feet squarely in mid-air. A veteran congressional staff person is quoted in a recent issue of the KAPPAN magazine, in an article entitled "Hail to a Chief or Two: The Indifferent Presidential Record in Education," as saying that "regarding legislative policy making as it affects education, the operative instruction seems to be, don't bother me with the facts" (George Kaplan, KAPPAN, September, 1984, pages 7-12).

But the fact of the matter is, sometimes the facts are bothersome. But if we ignore the facts, circumstances only get worse. Intelligent, fact-supported decision making is not always the easiest nor the most expedient, but it is the best and assures the most lasting benefits.

FIFTEEN MOST COMMON NEEDS

Enumerated here, are fifteen needs which are generally characteristic of BIA education programs nationally. Thirteen of the fifteen needs are characteristic of all of the programs that were studied, and all fifteen needs are characteristic of 95% of the programs. The data were derived from observations conducted on sixteen reservations across the United States.

FINDINGS

The needs reported below are listed in random order. No effort has been made to order them in importance from the greatest to the least. As noted in the introduction, the needs are generally common to all of the schools that were studied. It is the author's opinion that they all bear careful attention. It is also the author's opinion that in the main these findings apply to education in the public schools as well, and that what is reported here should be of equal interest to regular education.

1. <u>The need to increase the academic engagement of students.</u>

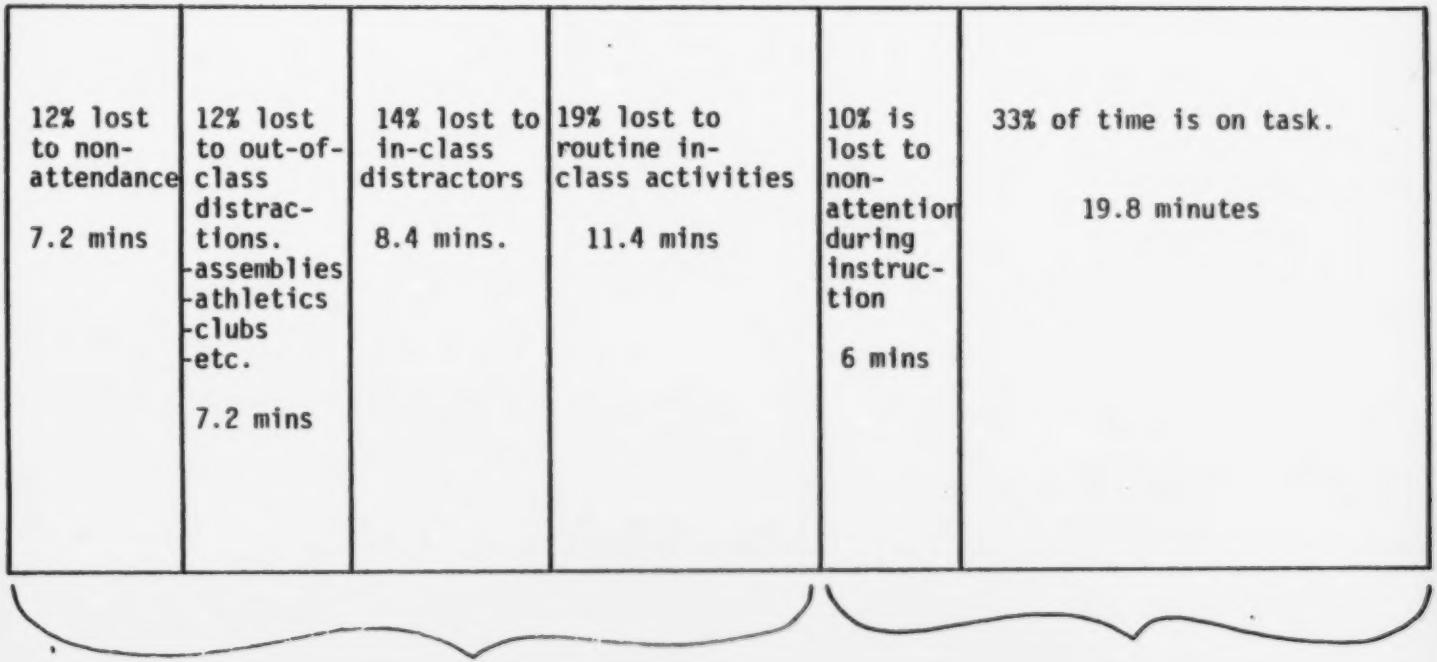
Time on task, and levels of student academic engagement are topics of considerable interest in education today - as well they should be. Assessing time-on-task and levels of academic engagement is an imprecise matter, though the technology does exist to gather such data with sufficient accuracy to communicate with teachers and educators a generally clear sense of conditions and needs reflective of a typical BIA class.

A typical hour of school was observed to be spent in the following manner: (see Figure 3):

43% in instruction	25.8 mins.
19% in routine activities (getting ready for, and putting away after, instruction)	11.4 mins.
12% in non-academics (assemblies, class parties, etc.)	7.2 mins.
14% in behavior control and other in-class	8.4 mins.

FIGURE 3

HOW A TYPICAL SCHOOL HOUR IS SPENT


12% lost to non-attendance
7.2 mins
12% lost to out-of-class distractions.
-assemblies
-athletics
-clubs
-etc.
7.2 mins
14% lost to in-class distractors
8.4 mins.
19% lost to routine in-class activities
11.4 mins
10% is lost to non-attention during instruction
6 mins
33% of time is on task.
19.8 minutes
57% of the hour (34 min. & 12 secs.) is gone before instruction begins.
43% (25 min. & 48 secs.) remains for instruction of which 19 min. & 48 secs. is on task.

distractors

12% to non-attendance 7.2 mins.

Of the 25.8 minutes of instruction, students were observed to be on task an average of 77.0% of the time, 19.8 minutes of actual on-task behavior per hour. The 6.0 minutes of off-task behavior were typically caused by (see Figure 2):

Students talking out 3.3 mins

Students out-of-seat (during which time not only was the out-of-seat student off task, but he/she had a tendency to disrupt other students) 3.2 mins

Disruptions of one type or another tend to occur on the average of about 1 per minute, though the range in the frequency of disruption was immense, ranging from only a few per hour to a dozen per minute.

The data depict a circumstance which suggests that less than one half of a student's day is spent attending to instructional tasks. Combine these data with data from another study I recently completed to the effect that Indian students are in school an average of only 87% of the time, we can conclude that during an entire school year, students are academically engaged only about 1/3rd of the time intended for instruction.

2. <u>The need to improve teaching strategies relative to the use of cues and reinforcers, and the appropriate involvement of students in the learning task to assure entry level skill mastery.</u>

Benjamin Bloom, in his provocative article "The New Direction in Educational Research: Alterable Variables" (Kappan, Feb., 1982, p. 40) sheds considerable light on the need for educators to draw

a distinction between teacher characteristics and teaching skills, noting that "...more important than such things as teachers' age, experience, membership in teacher organizations, personality, and attitude, are teachers' ability to employ the three major tools of good teaching: cues, reinforcement, and student participation in the learning activity, variables which research has established as having a direct causal relationship with student learning in the classroom."

As I have observed teachers (regular or special education) working with students, I am impressed to note that they tend to approach the teaching act intuitively rather than professionally (see Figure 4). That is, rather than employing strategies that are based on science, data, laws, and principles of learning and behavior, their approach to the teaching act tends to be based on feelings, expediency, and what seems at the moment to be a good idea.

For example, we know that it is particularly important for students with learning deficits to be taught a skill in a highly structured, carefully sequenced manner, where success is assured and recognized at each step along the way, and where functional skill master is achieved <u>before</u> a subsequent skill is taught. Instances are few where teachers of children in Indian school settings are guided in their teaching by such established principles of learning. Rather, instruction tends to proceed according to intuition, or as directed by worksheets, workbooks, or texts, and where the pursuit of subsequent skills is influenced more by daily lesson plans than by prerequisite skill mastery on the part of the student.

FIGURE 4

Professionalism vs. Intuition

The Professional Approach	The Intuitive Approach
Based on science, data, laws, and principles.	Based on feelings, expediency, hunches, and what sounds and seems to be good.

This is a tremendous problem, and one that needs to be addressed with vigor and determination if we are to ever hope for an adequate educational program in Indian schools.

3. <u>The need to appropriately challenge students relative to academic performance and behavioral compliance.</u>

In a word, students in Indian schools typically experience a more relaxed, less demanding educational environment. The relationship between teachers and students tends to be informal and on a first name basis. Students are freer to move about the room at will, radios and tape players are more apt to be broadcasting, and freedom to leave the room at will is more available.

Such an environment, according to hundreds of interviews with students and teachers--regular and special, typifies Indian education as "easy". Without a single exception, every Indian student that I have ever interviewed, sixth grade and above, has told me, "I can do more than is expected of me."

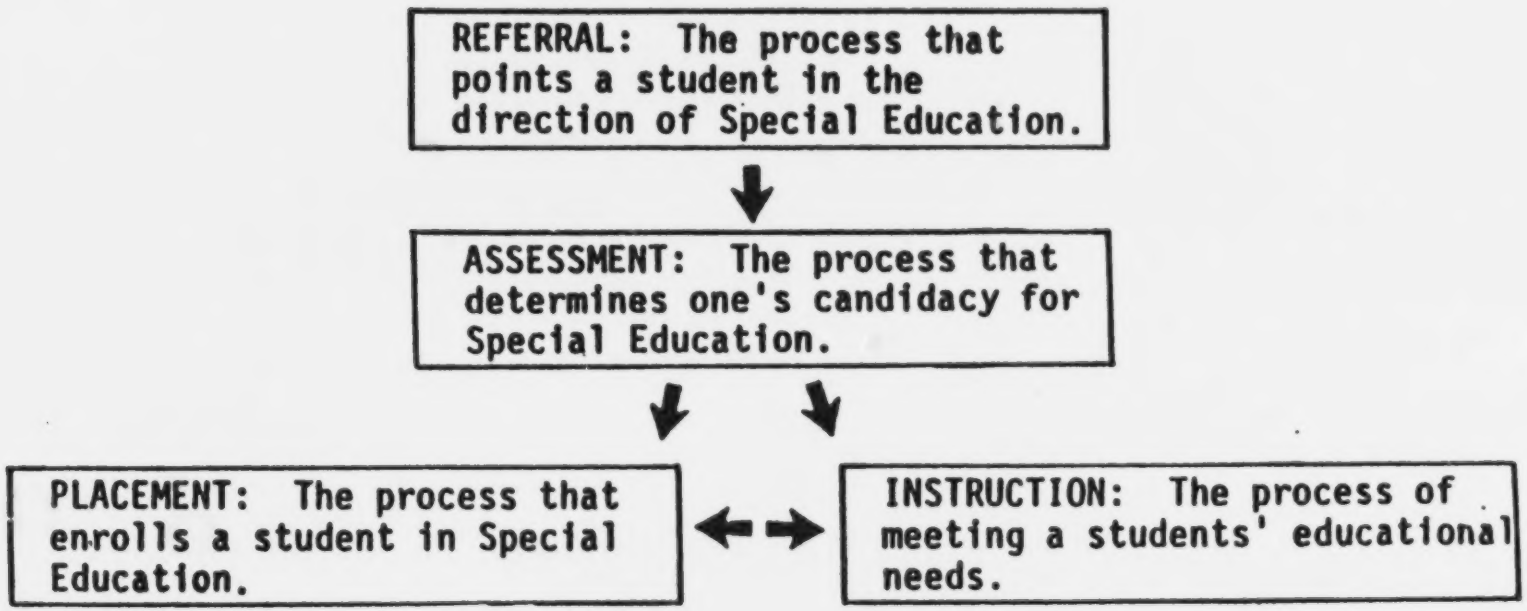
As educators, we need to structure our classes so that upon entering the room, students are cued to get on task, reinforced for remaining on task, and are instructed in a manner that is consistent with sound principles of to learning.

4. <u>The need to develop a functional relationship between the referral, assessment, placement, and instructional processes as they relate to special education (see Figure 5).</u>

Typically, these four critical processes are separate and distinct, one having little or no effect or benefit on the other.[1] Consequently undue expenses are incurred, children become

FIGURE 5

LINKING THE CRITICAL PROCESSES


REFERRAL: The process that points a student in the direction of Special Education.
ASSESSMENT: The process that determines one's candidacy for Special Education.
PLACEMENT: The process that enrolls a student in Special Education.
INSTRUCTION: The process of meeting a students' educational needs.

inappropriately diagnosed and labeled, placement is often questionable, and instruction is deprived of the benefits of assessment. If the welfare of students with special needs is to ever be addressed in any meaningful way, there must be strong linkages between these four processes; linkages which assure that the benefits of one process accrue to all others. For example, it is simply tragic that for all intents and purposes, the only communication between school teachers and school psychologists is a one- or two-page assessment report which says little more to the teacher than "This kid is handicapped." As observed by Keoth:[2]

> ...psychologists who presume to work in schools must know something about the process of instruction, about the children to be instructed, and about the complex interactive network that constitutes "school."
>
> The future of school psychology probably rests in our ability to come to grips with the "school" component of our title.

It makes little sense that a referral for assessment would proceed without first requiring a pre-referral assessment of student behavior and performance in the classroom to determine whether it is a learning problem or a teaching problem which has precipitated the referral. Such an analysis should also be made of the referring teachers' interactions with the child, followed by a pre-referral intervention strategy, to see if something can be done in the regular class to preclude the need to place a student in special education.

This whole four-part process needs to be much more carefully monitored and precisely administered in order to serve children appropriately.

5. The need to functionally define learning disabilities.

My studies reflect the findings of all others in this matter; simply, that a disproportionately large number of Indian students are classified as learning disabled when, in fact, they most certainly are not learning disabled. According to Ysseldyke,[3] using existing "operational definitions" of learning disabilities, 92% of a group of low achieving students was classified as learning disabled, and that "the number of minority and low socio-economic status children thought to evidence academic difficulty and behavior problems was at least twice as high..." as for other students.[4] Given such circumstances, regular educators in BIA schools have an easily accessable conduit for the removal from their classes of students who don't fit the mold. As noted in a study conducted at the Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities, University of Minnesota,

> As presently conceptualized, the category of 'learning disabilities' is an ill-defined disorder with little consistency among definitions to allow for reliable prediction of L.D. classification. A student may or may not be classified depending on which definition is selected, how it is operationalized, and the idiosyncratic approach to assessment by the diagnostician.

In a word, there are far, far too many Indian students enrolled in special education who are classified as L.D. My observations suggest that no more than 3 out of every 100 Indian students classified as L.D. are, in fact, L.D. Such a circumstance constitutes an abuse of the system, is a disservice to the students, and is unfair to the teachers. There is every reason to believe that this circumstance is rooted in school finance, as a convenience to regular education, is an excuse for

poor teaching, and is an artifact of inappropriate assessment and test interpretation--none of which speaks to the needs of students. Since 1976, the population of students classified L.D. has increased by 119%, which the number of school children has decreased 9.4%. And thoe who are most effected are minority students (see Figure 6).

6. The need to strengthen the secondary programs by providing prevocational and vocational training opportunities.

Unemployment among Native Americans runs as high as 85%, and ranges between 40% and 85% throughout the country. With jobs being so hard to find generally, students with academic, intellectual, social, sensory, and/or physical problems are at an even greater disadvantage when competing for employment opportunities in the adult world. Despite this grim reality, there are almost no prevocational and vocational training opportunities available for students in BIA funded schools. Occasionally, one will find crafts, woodworking, metal working programs, and industrial arts programs, but these are no substitute for bonified vocational preparation.

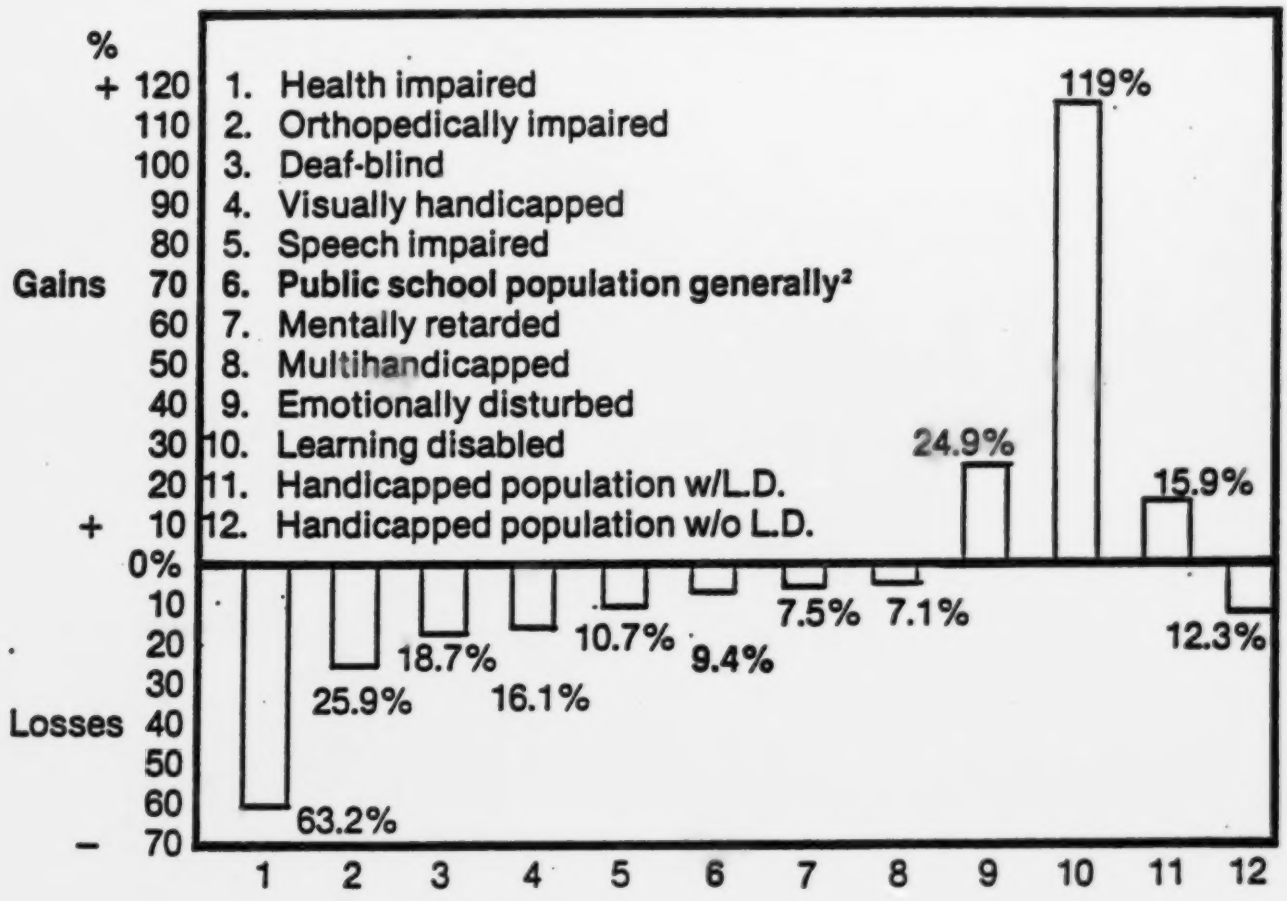
Simply stated, educational programs available to Indian students are doing virtually nothing to prepare their students in any systematic, well defined way to assume a competitive posture in the job market.

7. The need to improve and increase the cooperation and coordination between regular education and special education.

Although the affect between regular and special education is generally good, there is little evidence of any plan or policy to

FIGURE 6

ENROLLMENT GAINS OR LOSSES IN STUDENT POPULATIONS[1] 1976-1983



1. These figures are extrapolated from data furnished by the U.S. Department of Education Office of special Education Programs.

2. This figure was extrapolated from data furnished by *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1984, 104th Edition*, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

assure that the two programs proceed in a coordinated way. Cooperative efforts tend to be on a teacher-by-teacher basis rather than as an initiative of the system. The IEP process does bring regular and special education personnel together, but this tends to be on an intermittent basis, only as the need arises, and is generally aimed at removing the student from regular education and placing him/her into special education. The process, unfortunately, typically acts to put distance between special education and regular education: the child is now "sp. ed.", "94-142", or "resource room" and no longer of concern to regular education.

There is little evidence that overall school planning contains goals to which special education can relate. How teachers conduct their special education classes, and what they teach, tends to be idiosyncratic to the teachers: they do "their thing".

8. The need to improve parental involvement in the educational system.

Typically, there is only spotty evidence of active parental involvement in the education of children, particularly those placed in special education: 4% or less. The attitude of parents tends to be passive: "The schools know best. I really have nothing to offer." This situation is exacerbated by boarding school placement.

One should not interpret this finding to mean that parents are generally disinterested, or not caring. Rather, it seems to generate from an attitude among Indian parents that the BIA is there to take care of such needs, and "There is really no need for

me to be involved. They are the experts."

It is generally safe to say that parents on the reservation are less accessible (fewer phones, long distances to travel over bad roads), rely on the BIA to represent them, and are less inclined to see themselves as serving a role in the formal education of their children.

9. The need to elimininate the effects of teacher isolation.

Teacher isolation is physical, social, and/or professional, and need not be a function of remoteness. Teachers working in urban Indian school settings are nearly as inclined to express concern over "isolation" as are teachers working in Indian schools in remote settings. The author is reminded of a group of teachers who wanted him to spend some time with them after school "to just talk about what's happening in education in America." "We are so isolated at this school", they said. The school is located in the heart of one of the nation's largest urban settings.

Isolation evidences itself in ways that keep teachers from interacting with other educators generally, and even from fellow educators within their own system. The flow of ideas is seldom refreshed; political, cultural, and interpersonal problems take precedence over professional matters and the improvement of instruction; and teachers begin to feel "locked in" to a system where the education of children is perceived to be secondary to other agenda addressed by the decision makers. Professional and economic survival become paramount.

Though it may be too grand a notion to hope to "eliminate the effects of teacher isolation," it is altogether reasonable that through educationally-oriented leadership, and through the

creative use of communications technology, the effects of teacher isolation in Indian schools can be remarkably reduced.

10. The need to decrease staff turnover, or decrease the effects of staff turnover.

High rates of staff turnover (administrative and teacher) is generally common in BIA schools, with rates of turnover reaching to 100%. Although a single representative metric descriptive of staff turnover in BIA schools nationally would be difficult if not impossible to compute, it appears likely that any given school within the system can expect a 25% to 75% change in staff annually. It is also likely that 70% to 90% of a given school's staff is actively seeking employment elsewhere, and about 65% of a given school's staff has remained at that school no more than two years.

Reasons most commonly given for seeking employment elsewhere include (in random order):

1. Isolation: physical, social, and professional.
2. Inadequate fringe benefits and retirement plan.
3. Political and cultural impediments to instruction.
4. Poor salaries and inadequate funds to support instruction (materials, supplies, equipment, etc.). (This was most often typical of contract schools.)
5. Lack of administrative support (tribal and/or school based) of school personnel.

Given the nature of the setting, high staff turnover in BIA schools will likely always be a problem, but ways need to be found to reduce the effects of turnover, possibly through better staff orientation and inservices training, and through the training of

local boards of education and administrative staff.

11. The need to establish a functional relationship between student IEPs and classroom instruction.

A review of IEPs for special education students revealed that nearly all were legally in compliance with P.L. 94-142; however, they were seldom referred to by teachers, regular or special education, as a guide to instruction, and they appeared to have little if any direct effect of instruction. This scenario is not at all unique to BIA schools as observed by Morgan and Rhode:[5]

> Special education teachers apparently do not perceive a clear relationship between the IEP as a written document and the IEP as a determinant of what happens on a daily basis in the classroom. (P.66)

As noted earlier, teacher characteristics tend to account for the huge variances in teaching style and classroom management that are typically evident from one special education classroom to another in BIA schools. Perhaps if teachers were taught to make better use of IEPs, the degrees of variance would be substantially reduced and special education, as well as regular education classroom, would become more predictable, stable, and goal oriented environments for Indian students.

12. The need to improve the effectiveness of inservice training.

Inservice training is regarded at all staff levels as extremely important, but to date not very effective. The major problems interfering with effective inservice training are:

a. inadequate planning, including the failure to involve representative members of the target populations in the planning process,

b. the "remoteness" of training, i.e., training that takes place out of the classroom, and even out of the school,

c. duration of training, i.e., too short, and

d. little or no follow-up or follow-along support.

The constraints are certainly not peculiar to the BIA. The literature of education is replete with documented accounts of the general ineffectiveness of inservice training activities. This should not incline decision makers away from providing inservice training, however. On the contrary? Rather, the inclination should be in the direction of providing effective inservice training, as has been demonstrated both within and without BIA education.

13. <u>The need to decrease the mid-year transfer of students from school-to-school.</u>

Although valid, reliable data relative to student turnover are difficult to derive, it appears to range from a low of 10% at the elementary level to up to 70% at the high school level. Students living near public schools are more inclined to move back and forth between public and BIA schools. Students in boarding schools occasionally switch boarding schools, or return to a reservation school or nearby public school. Also, this vacillating tends to be more characteristic of students experiencing academic/behavioral problems. It was also observed that students from more stable homes, and who were more academically and socially successful, were inclined to attend public schools rather than BIA shools. As a consequence, there tends to be a disproportionately larger number of special education students in BIA schools, making the use of national incidence factors relatively useless for determining the

reasonableness of the balance between regular and special education students in any given BIA school.

Generally, the BIA schools are seen as the placement of last resort. Students who are indecisive, having problems at school, and lacking in direction from home tend to find their way back to the BIA schools knowing that there is always a place for them there. But once there, they are often difficult to accommodate, manage, and instruct--circumstances that combine to weaken the instructional quality of the educational program--regular or special.

This is a complex social, ethnic, educational problem which requires considerably more study.

14. <u>The need to provide instruction in English.</u>

The author is quick to recognize that this is a socially and culturally controversial matter. Nevertheless, when considered in light of the lifelong needs of human beings for social, cultural, and economic success in these complex and technologically oriented times, the matter is clear: mastery with the language of the dominant culture is imperative! So far as developmentally, academically, and socially delayed youngsters is concerned, the situation is compounded proportional to the extent of the delay(s).

Dr. T. H. Bell, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, was completely correct when he announced recently that regardless of one's cultural and ethnic background, if he or she is to hope for access to the options available in society generally, the emphasis of that child's education, so far as

language is concerned, must be in English; no other language will suffice. Translating this to the classroom, it means that from the moment the child enters school until he/she leaves at the end of the day, the end of the year, the end of his/her public school education, only English should be spoken.* It should be spoken by teachers, aides, administrators, support personnel, and auxiliary staff.

Should a tribe decide that English will be taught as a second language, or that the tribal languages will be the language of instruction through grade 2 or 3 or whatever, it must be understood that such a decision has serious cultural, social, and economic consequences. Whereas, on the one hand, for example, the child might enjoy a greater affinity to cultural matters, he/she will be less likely to enjoy grade level academic success, with its many far reaching and lifelong implications.

In making this point, the author is not making a value judgement; he is not saying that one decision is absolutely any better than the other. He is only saying that each decision carries with it its own unique set of consequences, and it is the weight of those consequences on the lives of the constituency that must be considered in the decision making process. The author is also quick to point out that there will always be exceptions to what would most probably be the case. When dealing with human behavior, one can always find cases to the contrary. For example, there will be instances where an individual who was taught in the non-dominant language achieved great "success" as measured by

*Except in classes where foreign languages are being taught.(But English should not be taught as a foreign language.)

anyone's standards, and instances where one taught throughout his/her entire school years in nothing but the dominant language was, by anyone's standards, a classic "failure". But these are low probability results and should certainly not be the basis for decision making which favors instruction in a language other than that of the dominant culture.

15. The need for supervision of teachers that assures that instruction and classroom management reflect scientifically sound principals of behavior and instructional technology.

A problem that is ubiquitous to education, as noted earlier, is that teachers tend to teach and manage their classrooms intuitively rather than in ways that are rooted in the science and technology of instruction and behavior management. Although there are many dangers associated with this tendency, one which is particularly fretful is that the quality of the instructional program in the classroom is extremely vulnerable to the idiosyncracies of the teacher. In school systems where school policy and instructional supervision are well defined and operational, idiosyncracies can be moderated so that the variance between comparable classrooms within the system is reduced. For example, what one would observe in a resource room in one school would generally reflect what would be observed in another resource room in the same building, or in another building within the same system. Typically, however, in BIA schools, policy is less well defined, and instructional supervision is less operational (the emphasis is generally more on the extent of compliance with P.L. 94-142 and other regulatory matters than it is on the quality of

instruction). The result of this is that classrooms within BIA schools evidence a great deal of variance from one class to another; a variance which reflects the unchecked characteristics of the teachers in those classrooms. If the teachers are competent, the quality of instruction is proportionately high. If the teachers are not competent, the quality of instruction is proportionately low. Teachers tend "to do their thing" with little direction or moderation from either building level administrators or from staff of the central office.

It is this author's opinion that the need for classroom supervision to assure a high quality of instruction throughout the system is one of the most important needs to be addressed within BIA education.

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The needs enumerated and described herein, though derived from studies within the BIA special education system, are by no means unique to BIA schools. With only rare exception, these needs are equally characteristic of public school systems generally. But irrespective of whether these needs are unique or ubiquitous, left unmet, they will serve as constraints to the kind of educational programs Indian children need and deserve.

To meet these needs will not cost additional money. It will, however, require careful planning to assure that expenditures are high yield expenditures. These data are presented to aid the decision making process.

FOOTNOTES

1 Latham, G. I. The Referral, Assessment, Placement, and Instruction of Handicapped Children: A Literature Review. MPRRC, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322

2 Keoth, B.K. "Ask a different question: expect a different answer. School Psychology Review, 1981.

3 Ysseldyke, J., Algozzine, B., and Epps, S. "A logical and empirical analysis of current practice in classifying students as handicapped." Exceptional Children. October, 1983, pp 160-166.

4 Ysseldyke, J., Algozzine, B., and Richey, L. "Judgement under uncertainty: how many children are handicapped?" Exceptional Children. April, 1982, pp 531-534.

5 Morgan, D. & Rhode, V., "Teachers' attitudes toward IEPs: a two-year follow-up." Exceptional Children. Sept., 1983.